Sunday, October 14, 2018— Grace Life School of Theology—*From This Generation For Ever*
Lesson 62 Understanding Canonical Models: Self-Authenticating Model

Introduction

- Last week in Lesson 61 we continued our investigation into the different canonical models by looking at the Historically-Determined Model. Thus far we have considered the following models along with their various sub models:

  - <u>Community-Determined Model</u>— holds that the canon is determined by its reception or recognition by individuals or the church. (Lesson 60)

    - *Historical-Critical Model*—"the canon is a fundamentally human construct that can be adequately accounted for in purely natural terms." (Kruger, 32)

    - *Roman Catholic Model*—the Magisterium of the Roman Catholic Church infallibly determined the borders of the canon.

    - *Existential/Neoorthodox Model*—". . . authority is found not in the Scriptures themselves but ultimately in the individual who engages with them. [in this view] Authority exits when (and only when) an individual experiences God's word and responds to it in faith." (Kruger, 59)

  - <u>Historically-Determined Model</u>— maintains that if historical investigations can demonstrate that a book possessed apostolic content or authority it should be regarded as canonical. (Lesson 61)

    - *Canon-within-the-Canon Model*—argues that the New Testament ought to be reduced to its core truths by discovering the "canon within the canon" as a means of bringing unity to the faith. This is to be accomplished by historical investigation into the development of the New Testament books in order to determine which parts are genuine and which are not.

    - *Criteria-of-Canonicity Model*—maintains that the three criteria of apostolicity, orthodoxy, and usage need to be met in order for a book to be considered canonical. This model argues that the authority of the canon can be established by doing a rigorous historical investigation of the New Testament books and showing how they meet the criteria.

- Today in Lesson 62 we want to consider the third model for determining the boundaries of the canon, namely the Self-Authenticating Model.

Self-Authenticating Model

- All of the models that we have considered so far have one thing in common: "They all ground the authority of the canon in something outside the canon itself. It is this appeal to an external authority that unites all of these positions." (Kruger, 88) The net effect of this line of reasoning is

that the New Testament is not authoritative in and of itself, but human reason and judgment are the final court of appeal.

- Kruger highlights the need for a self-authenticating view of the canon:

    o "What is needed, then, is a canonical model that does not ground the New Testament canon in an external authority, but seeks to ground the canon in the only place it could be grounded, its own authority. After all, if the canon bears the very authority of God, to what other standard could it appeal to justify itself? Even when God swore oaths, "he swore by himself" (Heb. 6:13). Thus, for the canon to be the canon, it must *be self-authenticating*. A self-authenticating model of canon would take into account something the other models have largely overlooked: the *content* of the canon itself. Rather than looking only to its reception (community determined), or only to its origins (historically determined), this model would, in a sense, let the canon have a voice in its own authentication." (Kruger, 89)

- The idea that the canon was self-authenticating is certainly not a new one. One of the hallmark teachings of the Protestant Reformers that served as a basis for the notion of *sola scriptura* was the *autopistic* or self-authenticating nature of the canon. Consider the following quotations from the writings of the Reformers:

    o John Calvin—"God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word. . . Scripture is indeed self-authenticated." (Quoted in Kruger, 89)

    o Francis Turretin—Thus Scripture, which is the first principle in the supernatural order, is known by itself and has no need of arguments derived from without to prove and make itself known to us." (Quoted in Kruger, 89-90)

    o Herman Bavinck—"In the church fathers and the scholastics. . . [Scripture] rested in itself, was trustworthy in and of itself, and the primary norm for church and theology." (Quoted in Kruger, 90)

- Not wanting to be misunderstood in how he is using the terminology, Kruger is quick to clarify how he is using the term self-authenticating.

    o ". . . some may assume that a self-authenticating canon means that our model will be concerned only with the internal qualities of these books and that external data or evidence plays no role in the authentication process. While we certainly agree that these books do bear integral marks of their divinity (indeed, this will be a core component of the model put forth below), this does not mean that outside information has no place in how the canon is authenticated. We shall argue that when it comes to the question of canon, the Scriptures themselves provide grounds for considering external data: the apostolicity of books, the testimony of the church, and so forth. Of course, this external evidence is not to be used as an independent and neutral "test" to determine what counts as canonical; rather it should always be seen as something warranted by Scripture and interpreted by Scripture." (Kruger, 90)

- Later, Kruger offers this important elaboration:

  o "Thus, for the purposes of this study, we shall be using the phrase *self-authenticating* in a broader fashion than was typical for the Reformers. We are not using it to refer only to the fact that canonical books bear divine qualities (although they do), but are using it to refer to the way the canon itself provides the necessary direction and guidance about how it is to be authenticated. In essence, to say that the canon is self-authenticating is simply to recognize that one cannot authenticate the canon without appealing to the canon. It sets the terms for its own validation and investigation. A self-authenticating canon is not just a canon that claims to have authority, nor is it simply a canon that bears internal evidence of authority, but one that guides and determines how that authority is to be established." (Kruger, 91)

- Some might find this approach to authenticating the canon a bit strange. Many in our day maintain that holding a particular belief is irrational unless it can be authenticated on the basis of other beliefs. When it comes to the scriptures, however, this is not the case.

  o "The canon, as God's Word, is not just true, but the criterion of truth. It is an *ultimate* authority. So, how do we offer an account of how we know that an ultimate authority is, in fact, the ultimate authority? If we try to validate an ultimate authority by appealing to some other authority, then we have just shown that it is not really the ultimate authority. Thus, for ultimate authorities to be ultimate authorities, they have to be the standard for their own authentication. You cannot account for them without using them." (Kruger, 91)

- Critics of Christianity might charge the self-authenticating model of engaging in circular reasoning or trying to prove its authenticity by appealing to its own authority. Please recall that we had this discussion back in Lesson 26 when we were talking about inspiration. The common accusation that Christians use circular reasoning is actually true. In fact, everyone uses some degree of circular reasoning when defending his ultimate standard (though not everyone realizes this fact). (Viet, *Circular Reasoning*)

- *All* philosophical systems start with *axioms* (presuppositions), or non-provable propositions accepted as true, and deduce *theorems* from them. Therefore, Christians should not be faulted for having axioms as well, which are the propositions of Scripture (a proposition is a fact about a thing, e.g. God is love). So, the question for any axiomatic system is whether it is *self-consistent* and is *consistent with the real world*. (Sarfati, *Using the Bible to Prove the Bible*)

- *Self-consistency*—means that the axioms do not contradict each other. Indeed, allegedly circular reasoning at least demonstrates the *internal* consistency of the Bible's claims it makes about itself. If the Bible had actually disclaimed divine inspiration, it would indeed be illogical to defend it. (Sarfati, *Using the Bible to Prove the Bible*)

- *Consistent with the real world*—Christian axioms provide the basis for a coherent *worldview*, i.e. a thought map that can guide us throughout all aspects of life. Non-Christian axioms fail these tests, as do the axioms of other 'holy books'.

- o Biblical axioms logically and historically provided the basis for modern science. A major one is that the universe is orderly because it was made by a God of order, not the author of confusion (I Corinthians 14:33). But why should the universe be orderly if there were no God, or if Zeus and his gang were in charge, or if the universe were one big Thought, as Eastern religions teach? It could change its mind!

   Also, very importantly, the Christian axioms provide a basis for *objective right and wrong*. Note, it is important to understand the point here—*not* that atheists cannot be moral but that they have *no objective basis for this morality from within their own system*.

   Christian axioms also provide a basis for voluntary choice, since we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–27). But evolutionists believe that we are just machines and that our thoughts are really motions of atoms in our brains, which are just 'computers made of meat'. But then they realize that we cannot function in the everyday world like this. Science is supposed to be about predictability, yet an evolutionist can far more easily predict behaviour if he treats his wife as a free agent with desires and dislikes. For example, if he brings her flowers, then he will make her happy, i.e. for all practical purposes, his wife is a free agent who likes flowers. Nothing is gained in the practical world by treating her as an automaton with certain olfactory responses programmed by genes that in turn produce certain brain chemistry. So evolutionists claim that free will is a 'useful illusion'. (Sarfati, *Using the Bible to Prove the Bible*)

- The truth is that everyone uses some degree of circular reasoning when defending their ultimate standard (though not everyone realizes this fact). Yet, if used properly, the use of circular reasoning is not arbitrary and, therefore, not fallacious. Contrary to popular belief, circular reasoning is surprisingly a valid argument. Circular reasoning is a logical fallacy only when it is arbitrary, proving nothing beyond what it assumes. (Viet, *Circular Reasoning*)

- However, not all circular reasoning is fallacious. Certain standards must be assumed. Dr. Jason Lisle gave this example of a non-arbitrary use of circular reasoning:

   - o Without laws of logic, we could not make an argument.
   - o We can make an argument.
   - o Therefore, there must be laws of logic. (Viet, *Circular Reasoning*)

- While this argument is circular, it is a non-fallacious use of circular reasoning. Since we could not prove anything apart from the laws of logic, we must presuppose the laws of logic even to prove they exist. In fact, if someone were trying to *disprove* that laws of logic exist, he'd have to use the laws of logic in his attempt, thereby refuting himself. Your non-Christian friend must agree there are certain standards that can be proven with circular reasoning. (Viet, *Circular Reasoning*)

- Therefore, a certain degree of circularity is required in our justification of our knowledge of scripture. When establishing how foundational authorities are authenticated, this sort of circularity is not a problem.

- o "For instance, let us imagine that we want to determine whether sense perception is a reliable source of belief. If I see a cup on the table, how do I know my sense perception is accurate? How would I test such a thing? I could examine the cup and the table more closely to make sure they are what they seem to be (hold them, touch them, etc.). I could also ask a friend to tell me whether he sees a cup on the table. But in all these instances I am still assuming the reliability of my sense perception. . . Alston sums it up, "There is no escape from epistemic circularity in the assessment of our foundational sources of belief."" (Kruger, 92-93)

- Having established that some degree of circularity is unavoidable when dealing with foundational authorities, Kruger then makes application to extrabiblical data.

  - o ". . . when it comes to authenticating the canon, we are not so much proving Scripture as we are using Scripture. Or, even better, we are *applying* Scripture to the question of which books belong in the New Testament. Perhaps this is a more tangible way to think of a self-authenticating canon because it is not all that different (in principle) from the way we apply the teaching of Scripture to any other question before us, whether politics, science, the arts, or anything else. And whenever the Scripture is applied to an issue, it is perfectly appropriate (and necessary) to use extrabiblical "facts." For example, if we want to apply the teaching of Scripture to, say, the field of bioethics (stem-cell research, human cloning, etc.), then we cannot just read the Bible only; the Bible does not speak *directly* of these things. It does not tell us what cloning is and what it entails. We actually have to acquire some outside information about these bioethical issues before we can reach biblical conclusions about them. So it is when it comes to applying the Scriptures to the question of the canon." (Kruger, 93)

- One ought to not be confused by this line of reasoning.

  - o "But just because our conclusions required extrabiblical data does not mean the conclusions themselves are unbiblical or uncertain. We can still have biblical *knowledge* even with extrabiblical *data*. John Frame argues at length that a sharp distinction should not be made between the meaning of the Bible and the application of the Bible—we do no really understand the meaning until we can apply it correctly to the world around us. Thus, he declares, "applications of Scripture are as authoritative as the specific statements of Scripture . . . Jesus and others held their hearers responsible if they failed to apply Scripture properly." The Westminster Confession affirms a similar idea when it says that authority belongs not only to those teachings "expressly set down in Scripture" but also to that which "by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture" (1.6). Similarly, even though the Scripture does not *directly* tell us which books belong in the New Testament canon (i.e., there is no inspired "table of contents"), we can account for that knowledge if we apply Scripture to the question." (Kruger, 93-94)

- "When we do apply the Scripture to the question of which books belong in the canon, we shall see that it testifies to the fact that God has created the proper epistemic environment wherein

belief in the New Testament canon can be reliably formed." (Kruger, 94) This epistemic environment includes three components:

- o *Providential Exposure*—"in order for the church to be able to recognize the books of the canon, it must first be providentially exposed to these books. The church cannot recognize a book that it does not have."

- o *Attributes of Canonicity*—"these attributes are basically characteristics that distinguish canonical books from all other books. There are three attributes of canonicity: (1) divine qualities (canonical books bear the "marks" of divinity), (2) corporate reception (canonical books are recognized by the church as a whole), and (3) apostolic origins (canonical books are the result of the redemptive-historical activity of the apostles)."

- o *Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit*—"in order for believers to rightly recognize these attributes of canonicity, the Holy Spirit works to overcome the noetic effects of sin and produces belief that these books are from God."

- "These three components must all be in place if we are to have knowledge of the canon. We cannot know canonical books unless we have access to those books (providential exposure); we need some way to distinguish canonical books from other books (attributes of canonicity); and we need to have some basis for thinking we can rightly identify these attributes (internal work of the Spirit)." (Kruger, 94)

- In our next study we will consider each of the components of a self-authenticating canon with more detail.

Works Cited

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